

City of Cleveland, Ohio
Mayor Justin M. Bibb

Request for Qualifications

CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Phase II: Long-Term
Needs and
Infrastructure
Consultant

Issued: 10/13/22

Responses Due: 6:00 p.m. 11/1/22

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1. Introduction and Background

As part of a sweeping agenda for growth, justice, progress, and prosperity across the City of Cleveland, Mayor Justin M. Bibb and Cleveland City Council are committed to a robust digital equity agenda and addressing the city's digital divide.

According to 2020 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 44 percent of Cleveland households have no wireline broadband connection.¹ 27 percent of Cleveland households have no broadband at all, including via cellular data plans.² The lack of connectivity is most pronounced in Cleveland's east side neighborhoods, which are predominantly non-white and low-income—but nowhere is a Cleveland neighborhood doing better than a suburb next door.

Since the new Administration and new City Council took office in January 2022, however, the City has worked diligently to lay the foundation for targeted improvements. It developed a two-phased strategy to address on the root causes of the digital divide in Cleveland. It secured funding from generous philanthropic partners to employ a Digital Equity & Inclusion Manager, who will wake up each day focused on the immediate needs of the City. And it issued a major RFP to secure access to digital adoption services and an affordable, high-quality broadband plan for every Cleveland resident.

But even as the City has directed resources, attention, and capital to address its immediate needs, it recognizes the impending long-term infrastructure challenges that it faces. For example, only 41 percent of Clevelanders currently have access to a fiber optic internet connection, according to the latest FCC data³—leaving Cleveland's market-rate and low-income internet users both far behind those in peer cities. Meanwhile, gigabit-tier service subscriptions exploded by 425 percent from fourth quarter 2019 to fourth quarter 2021.⁴ And model cities like Chattanooga, Tennessee have leveraged their ubiquitous fiber infrastructure deployment into a ten-year return-on-investment of \$2.69 billion, with the creation or retention of nearly 10,000 jobs.⁵ Cleveland is ripe for a similar investment—to provide superior city services and to guarantee maximal connectivity access for its residents and businesses.

As such, the City is releasing this RFQ for outside consultant support to provide expert support, apply for and win funding from competitive sources, and ultimately address these long-term and infrastructure elements of Cleveland's digital divide.

¹ "Presence and Types of Internet Subscriptions in Household," American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, 2020, [available here](#).

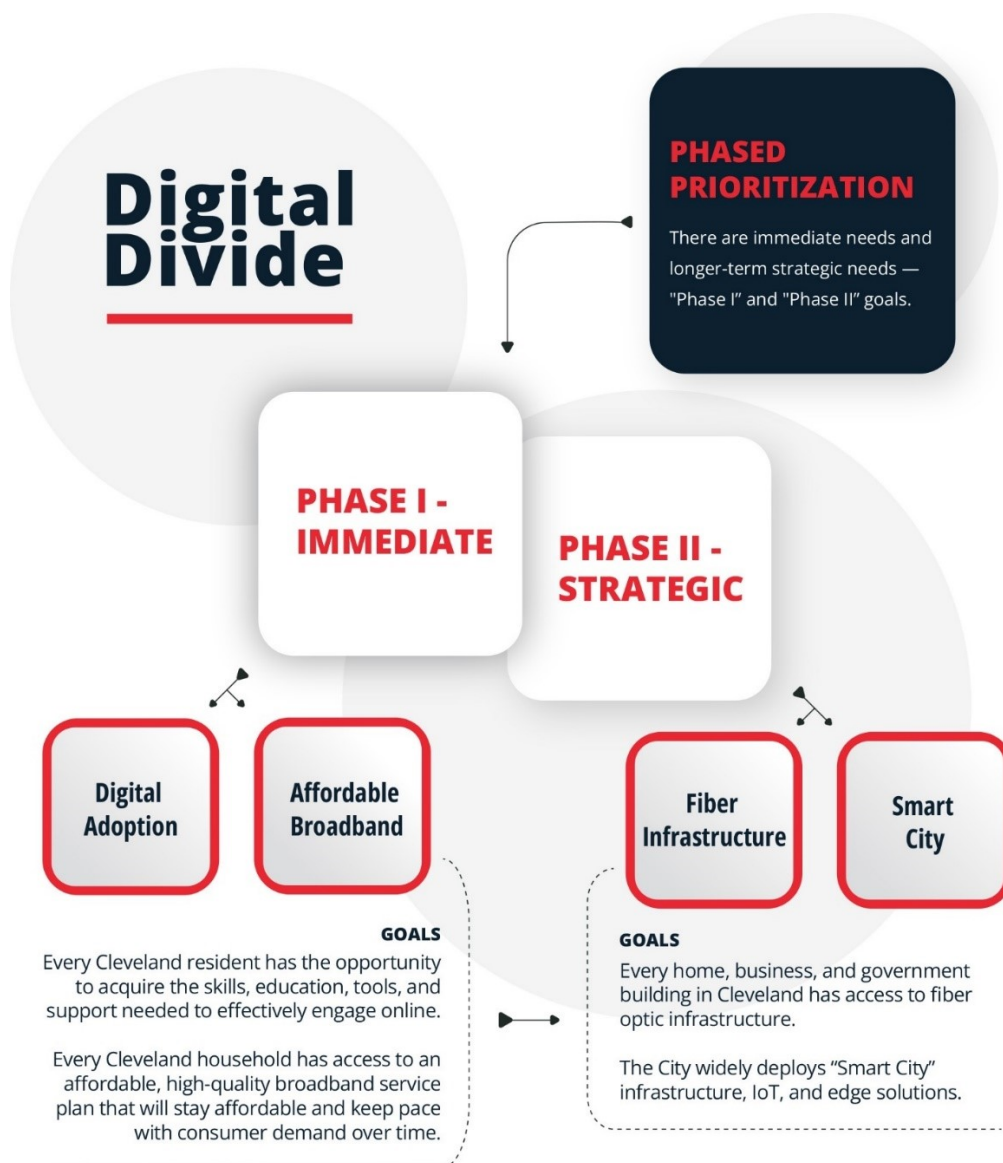
² *Id.*

³ "Number of Fixed Residential Broadband Providers—Cleveland, OH," Federal Communications Commission, June 2021, [available here](#).

⁴ OBVI Broadband Insights Report, "OpenVault, Q4 2021, [available here](#).

⁵ "Ten Years of Fiber Optic and Smart Grid Infrastructure in Hamilton County, Tennessee," Bento J. Lobo, Ph.D., CFA, 8/31/2020, [available here](#).

Fig. 1: High-Level Overview of Digital Divide Strategy. The City of Cleveland is addressing its Phase I goals through a separate RFP. This RFQ aims to provide consultant support for addressing its Phase II goals, namely the “fiber infrastructure” element.



2. Scope of Services

The City is seeking to partner with one or multiple experienced professionals or firms to assess the City's long-term needs and opportunities regarding broadband access and infrastructure. The City is also seeking support and expertise to meet those needs and reach each opportunity presented.

If a given Proposer can only provide consulting services for one or some of the deliverables listed, the City would still welcome their RFQ response. The City acknowledges that most firms do not both develop broadband plans and apply for broadband funding, for example, and that the City may need to partner with multiple firms to address each of its goals.

The specific services sought by this RFQ include but are not limited to the below:

- 1) Needs Assessment. Conduct an expert-level city-wide broadband infrastructure needs assessment for residents, businesses, and City operations:
 - a. Identify location and nature of current broadband infrastructure.
 - b. Identify present-day gaps in service access.
 - c. Identify long-term broadband infrastructure needs.
 - d. Identify how those gaps and needs can be met.
- 2) Master Plan. Develop a long-term broadband infrastructure and connectivity master plan.
- 3) Digital Equity Plan. Contribute to development of a Digital Equity Plan and other strategic documents required by various funding sources.
- 4) Funding Applications. Identify and pursue funding opportunities for broadband infrastructure, digital adoption services, and other opportunities to close the digital divide.
 - a. Opportunities include but are not limited to the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program and the Digital Equity Act programs.
 - b. Duties includes submitting responses to requests for proposal, requests for information, grant applications, plan development calls, etc.
- 5) RFP Support. Draft, review, and oversee RFPs to have vendors to address identified needs. Assist in assessing proposals submitted to the City.

In addition to the deliverables above, the consultant will be expected to stay in frequent communication with City staff; participate in regularly scheduled meetings concerning strategies and tactics to advance the City's digital equity agenda; and report on progress, successes, and obstacles.

The consultant will propose a work schedule based on its experience working with the pace and schedule of high-profile municipal action, as well as to match with the City's needs. The City will expect the consultant to be available as needed to monitor specific developments and advance the City's interests.

3. Submission Process and Schedule

a. Principal Contact

Austin Davis, Senior Government Affairs Strategist & Assistant Director of Law, is the single point of contact (“Principal Contact”) for all matters relating to this RFQ. Proposers should direct all inquiries to the Principal Contact at: adavis3@clevelandohio.gov.

Proposers should not, under any circumstances, contact any City personnel (including senior City management or City employees with whom Proposers have an existing business or personal relationship) to discuss this RFQ without the Principal Contact’s prior written consent. Utmost discretion is expected of Proposers and all other RFQ recipients. Any recipient attempting to circumvent this process will risk elimination from further participation in this process.

b. Submission Instructions

Proposer shall submit their Proposal electronically. Submissions shall be sent via email to the Principal Contact. The email subject heading should be in the following format: “Digital Divide Consultant RFQ – Submission – [firm name]”.

The Finance and Fee Proposal must be packaged separately from the rest of the Proposal, ie in a different file attached to the same submission email.

Submissions should be prepared using Microsoft Office file formats to the maximum extent possible. They may be submitted in Adobe PDF formats or other common formats as appropriate. Attachments are welcome.

Submissions must be made by 6:00pm on 11/1/22.

Submissions received after the deadline, which state that information will be provided “at a later date,” or which are otherwise incomplete or fail to comply with the requirements set forth in this RFQ will be disqualified from participation in this RFQ process. Submissions that are not made via email to the Principal Contact with the appropriate email subject heading may also be disqualified from participation.

Submissions may not be amended after the submission deadline.

c. RFQ Schedule

The City has developed an estimated timeline for this RFQ. The City will move as quickly and efficiently as possible to determine the feasibility of each submission, move forward with term sheet discussions, and ultimately conclude an agreement. The City reserves the right to modify or update this schedule at any point in time.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
10/13/22	RFQ Release
10/21/22	Pre-Submittal Conference
10/28/22	Deadline for Submitting Questions
11/1/22	Deadline for Submitting Responses

d. Pre-Submittal Conference

A non-mandatory pre-submittal conference will be held on 10/21/22 via Microsoft Teams from 11:00am to 11:30am. The video conference link is [available here](#). Proposers can also dial in via 216-306-2628, phone conference ID 771 563 953#.

e. Submitting Questions

The deadline for questions or requests for clarification is 10/28/22 by 6pm. Questions must be submitted via email to the Principal Contact.

4. Submission Contents

The FRQ submission should include the following sections in the following order:

a. Cover

- Must include RFQ title as well as Proposer's complete name and mailing address.
- Must include telephone number and email address for Proposer's point of contact.
- Must include legal status (corporation, partnership, etc.) and tax number.
- Must confirm that the organization will comply with all provisions of this RFQ.

b. Table of Contents

c. Executive Summary

- A summary (one page maximum) of key submission features, which should include a high-level overview of your approach, your experience, and the distinguishing features of your submission.

d. Minimum Qualifications

- Description of firm experience and capabilities, which can include client references, responsive to the minimum qualifications described below:
 - Significant prior experience with broadband consulting for municipalities.
 - Detailed knowledge of broadband technology and application.
 - Detailed knowledge of the broadband industry.
 - Skills to provide strategic direction, articulate key strategic concepts, and focus on strategic issues.
 - To the extent that such services are offered: extensive prior experience in broadband planning activities and/or needs assessments for municipalities.
 - To the extent that such services are offered: past successes in identifying and securing competitive funding opportunities (state, federal, philanthropic, etc.) to address the digital divide.

e. Proposed Team Members

- List of key team members who will work on the City's projects and interact with City key personnel.
- Description of team members' experience and capabilities responsive to the qualifications described above. Should include resumes for proposed team members and references (client or otherwise) for each relevant team member.

f. Evaluation Framework Responses

i. Approach to Services

- A detailed description/narrative of offered services, as well as Proposer's approach to achieving the objectives listed in the above Scope of Services.

ii. Experience and Organization

- Description of qualifications to achieve the objectives listed in the above Scope of Services.
- Description of prior experience with other local governments seeking similar services.
- Description of capability to meet schedules and deadlines.
- Any additional relevant proficiencies beyond those specifically requested.
- One or more charts setting forth the services or tasks involved in executing the submission, identifying the team member(s) responsible for each task or service.
- In addition, for conflict of interest and related reasons, Proposer should provide a complete list of its telecom or related industry clients:
 - a) for whom Proposer provided services within the last ten years, and
 - b) with whom the City of Cleveland could reasonably consider partnering in the future to address to the digital divide, expand broadband access, build broadband infrastructure, etc.

iii. Communication

- Description of communication, cooperation, and follow-through skills.
- Description of how your group would organize time to continually and effectively communicate with relevant principals.
- Description of the Proposer's client engagement approach and process.

g. Fee Proposal

- Fee proposals must be submitted as a separate document and will not be scored.
 - Fees should be itemized by service, task, work product, or other deliverable as tracked by Proposer. An ultimate agreement's payment schedule will match this itemization, unless revised.

h. Supplemental Information

- Can include any additional information or attachments Proposer would like to submit in support of its submission.

5. Submission Terms

a. The City's Rights and Requirements

The Principal Contact may require Proposers to augment or supplement submissions—or to meet with the City's designated representatives for interview or presentation—to further describe the Proposer's qualifications and capabilities. The requested information, interview, meeting, or presentation shall be submitted or conducted, as appropriate, at a time and place the Principal Contact specifies.

The City reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to reject any proposal that is incomplete or unresponsive to the requests or requirements of this RFQ. The City reserves the right to reject any or all submissions and to waive and accept any informality or discrepancy in the proposal or the process as may be in the City's best interest.

The City reserves the right to reject any or all submissions or portions of them, to waive irregularities, informalities, and technicalities, to re-issue or to proceed to obtain the service(s) desired otherwise, at any time or in any manner considered in the City's best interests. The City may, at its sole discretion, modify or amend any provision of this notice or the RFQ.

b. Proposal as a Public Record.

Under the laws of the State of Ohio, all parts of a proposal, other than trade secret or proprietary information and the fee proposal, may be considered a public record which, if properly requested, the City must make available to the requester for inspection and copying.

Therefore, to protect trade secret or proprietary information, the Proposer should clearly mark each page - but only that page - of its proposal that contains that information. The City will notify the Proposer if such information in its proposal is requested, but cannot, however, guarantee the confidentiality of any proprietary or otherwise sensitive information in or with the proposal.

Blanket marking of the entire proposal as "proprietary" or "trade secret" will not protect an entire proposal and is not acceptable.

c. Failure to Comply

When determining a Proposer's future eligibility for a City contract, the City shall consider a Proposer's failure to comply with the representations of its proposal and its requirements as a failure to faithfully perform a contract.

d. Term of Proposal's Effectiveness

By submission of a proposal, the Proposer agrees that its proposal will remain effective and eligible for acceptance by the City until the earlier of the execution of a final contract or 180 calendar days after the proposal submission deadline (the "Proposal Expiration Date").

e. Execution of a Contract

A successful Proposer shall, within ten business days after receipt of a contract prepared by the City Director of Law, exclusive of Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, execute and return the contract to the City together with evidence of proper insurance and intent to conform to all requirements of the contract. Attached hereto or which are a part hereof and all

applicable federal, state and local laws and ordinances prior to or at the time of execution of the contract.

f. “Short-listing”

The City reserves the right to select a limited number (a “short list”) of Proposers to make an oral presentation of their qualifications, proposed services, and capabilities. The City will notify the short-listed Proposers selected for oral presentations in writing.

g. Proposer’s Familiarity with RFQ; Responsibility for Proposal

By submission of a proposal, the Proposer acknowledges that it is aware of and understands all requirements, provisions, and conditions in and of this RFQ and that its failure to become familiar with all the requirements, provisions, conditions, and information either in this RFQ or disseminated either at a pre-proposal conference or by addendum issued prior to the proposal submission deadline, and all circumstances and conditions affecting performance of the services to be rendered by the successful proposer will not relieve it from responsibility for all parts of its Proposal and, if selected for contract, its complete performance of the contract in compliance with its terms. Proposer acknowledges that the City has no responsibility for any conclusions or interpretations made by Proposer on the basis of information made available by the City. The City does not guarantee the accuracy of any information provided and Proposer expressly waives any right to a claim against the City arising from or based upon any incorrect, inaccurate, or incomplete information or information not otherwise conforming to represented or actual conditions.

h. Interpretation

The City is not responsible for any explanation, clarification, interpretation, representation or approval made concerning this RFQ or a Proposal or given in any manner, except by written addendum. The City will deliver an electronic copy of each addendum issued, if any, to each individual or firm that requested and received a RFQ. Any addendum is a part of and incorporated in this RFQ as fully as if originally written herein.